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ABSTRACT

The origin, development, and implementation of a university summer session program in Spain concentrating on mass communication is described. The preparation in the American university included travel arrangements, insuring the communication hardware, packing appropriate textbooks, and orientation of faculty and students who were drawn from several universities. In Spain, the students lived on the University of Madrid campus, attended courses, did some traveling, and toured the facilities of "Radio-Television Espana." The course work required the student to perform research in both print and electronic media. It seemed that the communication students in this program had come to a better understanding of other cultures, and gained a broader perspective of what broadcasting is about. (AMH)

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THE AMERICAN ACQUISITION OF LINGUISTIC AND MASS COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE SPANISH AMBIANCE

by

A. Anthony Oseguera

About a year ago the chairman of the Modern Foreign Language Department at Valdosta State College spoke to a relatively young mass communication professor concerning the teaching of mass media abroad. The idea proposed by the senior professor was simple yet complex. "If we are able to afford American students the opportunity of learning Spanish in a totally Spanish environment, why not also include courses in mass communication?" Quite naturally, the proposition was too enticing to be ignored.

As a former student of several foreign languages including Spanish, and particularly as one especially interested in the emerging area of international broadcasting, the younger professor immediately recognized the interdependence of the two seemingly different areas of communication. The challenge was too important to pass up. Imagine, the opportunity for American radio-television-film students to learn a foreign language while at the same time continuing their studies in telecommunications.

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Specific questions arose as to the nature of the mass communication curriculum outside the United States. What courses should be offered, at what level, who should be included,and what size should the class number; for instance, should high school students be permitted to enroll in a college level class and under what circumstances? Would it be preferable to teach production courses over history and theory courses and why? If advance courses were offered, this factor assuredly would rule out be - ginning students. But, what about the problems involved in processing film and the fact that the libraries were Spanish? In short, what did Spain offer the student of mass communication besides the acquisition of Spanish as a second language? (As if the latter were not sufficient, yet the question had to be asked!) Of course, there were many other technical problems, such as, taking our own "hardware" (equipment in film jargon). A simple task like getting the hardware insured seemed almost insurmountable. Nevertheless, one does not risk losing $10,000.00 worth of cameras, lights, editors, etcetera, that belong to his employer.

After a perusal of the R-TV-Film/Speech Communication curriculum and after having been informed as to the specific needs of the program, based on a poll[1] to determine student course preferences within and without the mass communication area, a curriculum was advanced.

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[1]Mass communication students were asked to list in priority four classes they wished to take for the summer session in Spain program. Seniors listed those courses they needed to fulfill graduation requirements. All students listed at least one Spanish course with the rest being mass media courses.

The courses suggested included:

Cinematography
Advanced Cinematography
History of Broadcasting
Broadcast Theory
Internship: International Broadcasting
Beginning Spanish
Intermediate Spanish
Art: El Prado Museum

These courses were overwhelmingly elected by prospective students for the Summer Program in Spain whose academic major was R-TV-Film/mass communication. The Spanish major and the liberal arts major have ample opportunity to take a complement of advanced Spanish courses because of their preparation, inclination, and curriculum needs. The latter was particularly true of teachers attempting to complete teaching certification requirements and instructors moving toward advance degrees in foreign language or Spanish. Because of the diverse nature of the communications curriculum offered by the College in conjunction with other schools, such as, East Tennessee University, the Summer Program in Spain was able to draw faculty and students from at least six institutions of higher learning.

Most of the individuals that participate in the program have never visited Spain, and the excitation they experience before boarding the jumbo jet Iberian airliner is the result of weeks of anticipation culminating in synergistic catharses. The seemingly endless hours of preparation, making sure the hardware is insured, finding out in advance the nature of film processing in Spain - Madrid, packing all the appropriate textbooks and lecture materials required, etcetera, now begins to "pay off." But, not all of the members attending the educational consortium in Spain board the same airliner in the same location. Some depart from New York instead of Miami, while still others join the group at a later date due to a two week stay as opposed to a

normal six week commitment. Once in mid air there is ample time to reflect about family and friends left behind and future expectations.

While in Spain the students live on the University of Madrid Campus. The accommodations are modest, but each person has a room to himself or herself. In brief, the MARA dormitory is comfortable. The meals are excellent especially when considering the price. Most people familiar with overseas programs in education, of one sort or another, realize that the institution providing the suggested program attempts to include dormatory, meals, excursions, etcetera, along with the tuition fee and the round-trip airplane fare in one over-all price. Additional expenses, of course, are incurred by the student and they become his responsibility. Most students budget their time and money very well. This fact is particularly true where the completion of assigned homework is concerned.

Cinematography requires a considerable amount of time. In adjudicating between one student's work and that of another, the instructor must take into account the nature and complexity of the student's project. The Spanish ambiance is so varied that the student of film has myriad possibilities in the selection of appropriate topography, milieu, scene, and circumjacence all which suggest theme, plot, and narrative depending on the treatment - fiction or documentary. Course work in broadcast history and theory requires the student to perform research in both print and electronic media. Students use their textbooks and supplementary readings to apprise themselves of core material as it pertains to the course. The Centro Cultural de los Estados Unidos[2] in Madrid has a fantastic library equipped with video playback units,

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[2]The Centro Cultural de los Estados Unidos is well guarded for security reasons and is entirely safe. At one point in their history they felt it necessary to take these measures since terrorists have shown themselves around the globe from time to time.

film projectors, and the like, that enable students to both read and view material in their native language - English. The library accommodates individuals with bilingual skills. And, courses in English are offered for the Madrileño[3] who wishes to visit the United States. Finally, the City of Madrid has many stores where motion picture film can be developed at a reasonable price, but the cost of film is more expensive!

A typical day for the American students might include breakfast, depending on how late they were out the night before, classes throughout the morning and, sometimes, during the early afternoon. The Spaniards close their shops around 1:00 p.m. and return after siesta at about 4:00 p.m. and continue their work until 8:00 p.m. The American students follow the same schedule with the exception that their afternoons and early evening hours are spent visiting museums, libraries, historical sites, attending programs, investigating the City, facilitated by a very modern public transportation system including both subways and buses and studying as required. Both the Americans and Spaniards eat at 2:00 p.m. sharp. (Wine may be purchased with the meal for seventy pesetas/one dollar or less.) Likewise, they both share the same hour of supper which is from 9:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. For those individuals interested in the Spanish night life, well, don't expect any "action" until after 1:00 p.m.: The reference here pertains to nightclubs and the like, but not theatres, opera, ballet, flamenco,[4] concerts

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[3]Madrileño does not necessarily imply that the citizen of Spanish nationality hails from Madrid, but rather, has lived there for sometime.

[4]Flamenco for the Spaniard implies someone from Flanders or someone or something special: There is nothing better.* For the American and for the Spaniard, it also implies the dance and song of Andalucia and its gypsies known as gitanos. *No hay mas flandes.

al aire libre,[5] symphonies, and much more, each usually feature two programs earlier in the evening. (Students are advised to use discretion when they are out late, Madrid has some four million people but is safe for the most part.) Having survived a day in Madrid, the students retire to rejuvenate themselves in anticipation of what tomorrow will bring.

Unfortunately, the time goes by too quickly. Yet, there has been sufficient opportunity to visit Avila, Salamanca,[6] Toledo, El Escorial, Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caidos, Segovia,[7] Sevilla, Granada, Malaga, and Peñon de Gibraltar.[8] A few students even spend a day in Africa, but at this point the American gypsy is lamenting the fact that he has run out of time and money. If the American school system has not adequately prepared our youth in the Hispanic Culture, Spanish is the unofficial second language of the United States, the Iberian Peninsula and the experience of living there has more than made up for the deficit.[9] Moreover, most mass communication students are familiar

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[5]Al aire libre - Open air concerts or outdoor concerts sometimes utilize the plaza de toros (bull ring) to accommodate very large audiences: i. e., the Saint Louis Municipal Opera in the United States. During the summer of 1980, the Antología Española was featured in the Plaza de Toros de Madrid: The Spanish Anthology is an epic extravaganza.

[6]Salamanca is known as one of the oldest university cities in all of Europe.

[7]Segovia is known for its acueducto romano and Alcazar: They of course must be seen to be appreciated like the Alhambra of Granada. The Alcazar and the Alhambra are superb examples of Moorish architecture. Both are situated at the then extreme outskirts of the Moorish realm in Spain: (The former to the north the latter to the south.)

[8]El Peñon de Gibraltar/The Rock of Gibraltar: The Fortress in the British Colony periodically permits tourists to enter from the Spanish sector, according to tourist information.

[9]The case may have been over-stated. The writer simply wishes to imply that the students have been awakened to a new universe of language study. It is hoped that this represents a beginning and not an end in the student's quest for a second or third language acquisition.

with Hemingway and, therefore, can easily relate to the spectacle of La Corrida de Toros. La Fiesta Brava in Chin Chon begins with the running of the bulls through the narrow streets. Students view drama in the streets through the camera's eye with the realization that a Spanish youth might seriously be injured or killed this day! Film takes on a totally different meaning. As in the United States, the Spanish press covers all major events. Ultimately, the American student will have the opportunity to visit Radio Televisión España/RTVE. Of all the excursions previously mentioned, the chance to see firsthand the most impressive of all telecommunication facilities in Spain becomes for the mass communication student the most significant event.

Radio Televisión España/RTVE

First, arrangements must be made with Radio-Televisión España's public relations department to accommodate two bus loads of American students in a tour through their facilities. (The trip is further facilitated by having obtained consultation from Mr. Guy Farmer - Agregado de Prensa - Embajada de los Estados Unidos,[10] who advises us of the general "set up" regarding telecommunications in Spain as it relates to the Spanish Government and vice-a-versa). Upon arriving at RTVE we are immediately asked to wait in the Security Office, whereupon we are met by personnel members from El Departamento de Relaciones Publicas - RTVE. Throughout the sojourn they are most accommodative.

We are informed that there are at least three complete television studios and some five complete radio studios fully equipped with the very latest media technology, including a vast network that ties RTVE with all of

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[10]Our Embassy or la Embajada de los Estados Unidos is willing to assist individuals who are doing research in Spain: One should call for an appointment beforehand, since, they are extremely busy.

Spain, along with her Balearic and Canary Islands. Further, we find that Spain and the other European countries send their news items pertaining to the nation and its posture to a general "clearing house" in Bruxelles.

In Brussels a decision is made concerning the suitability of a particular "story." If more than two countries are interested in the news item, then, it is carried throughout the European nations. However, it will not be carried if only one other country is desirous of same. In this instance, the respective countries concerned exchange news information limited to that specific material, otherwise, every story is carried as previously mentioned. In certain respects, based on six weeks of intensive viewing, the writer determines that there exists a greater variety of news, because of the collaborative efforts by the European telecommunication systems, in European electronic mass media than that found in the United States. Furthermore, the radio and television presentation aired utilizes a great deal of "foreign" native-voice with a minimum of "domestic" native-voice: Specifically, where the Spanish commentator only comments when he feels his audience may be confused as to the foreign tongue. Of course, there is a great deal of commentary by the on-camera reporter, but a "real" attempt is made to let the Spanish consumer interact with the "original" message. In our country the picture, if you will, is somewhat different. We rely on the Associated Press and the United Press International almost exclusively!

These wire services become our "National Network" insofar that the major networks, the American Broadcasting System, the Columbia Broadcasting System, and the National Broadcasting System, use them as the primary source of information. However accurately the AP and the UPI report, the American consumer almost always hears and views the message in English. Even when

the video tape or live telecast is coming from outside the United States, the totality of the discourse is English. "And what's wrong with that!?" the student asks. Observe the recent speeches given by the Canadian Prime Minister and the American President meeting jointly in the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa. When we saw and heard Messieurs Trudeau and Reagan over the major networks, we were not permitted the "privilege" of hearing either one of them speak in French! Are we to assume that educated Americans cannot speak the official language of the United Nations? Are we to surmise that educated Americans cannot understand the Mexican President's message to the American ambassadors visiting his nation? Of course not! But when the American mass media purposely assumes that the United States and all her allies speak English and only sometimes speak another language, their own, we make a serious error. The opportunity to hear and see other cultures speaking their language will contribute to a better understanding of the world at large.

To conclude, the Spanish experience is invaluable where American students are concerned, for the reasons stated previously. But, specifically stated, Americans learn that all the citizens of the world do not speak English however hard they might try. Europeans do try! They make a serious attempt to speak French, German, Spanish, and additional languages as they relate to their reality of the world. Again, this fact is manifested especially in the television news coverage, of which Spain is only one example. The mass communication student, in particular, gains more depth in his perspective of what broadcasting is all about- PEOPLE! Democracy is an ideal to which we prescribe, as such, it has no boundaries where language is concerned. Therefore, it becomes imperative to meet the rest of the world on "common ground!" In brief, the need is to establish a more uniform balanced presentation of news in the United States as it relates to foreign and/or international messages. To enable the American consumer to grasp the "totality" of the

message is paramount. If instructors at all levels of education are afforded the opportunity to travel abroad or to visit our sister nations on this continent, they might pay attention to their television reportage to see how far along they are on the continuum toward "Pluralism." Finally, our goal should be to continually strive for improved "qualitative dimensions" to match our improved "quantitative dimensions" vis-a-vis telecommunications in the United States of America. To this end, the acquisition of linguistic and mass communication skills is essential.